

Campaign Finance Reform: An Independent Perspective

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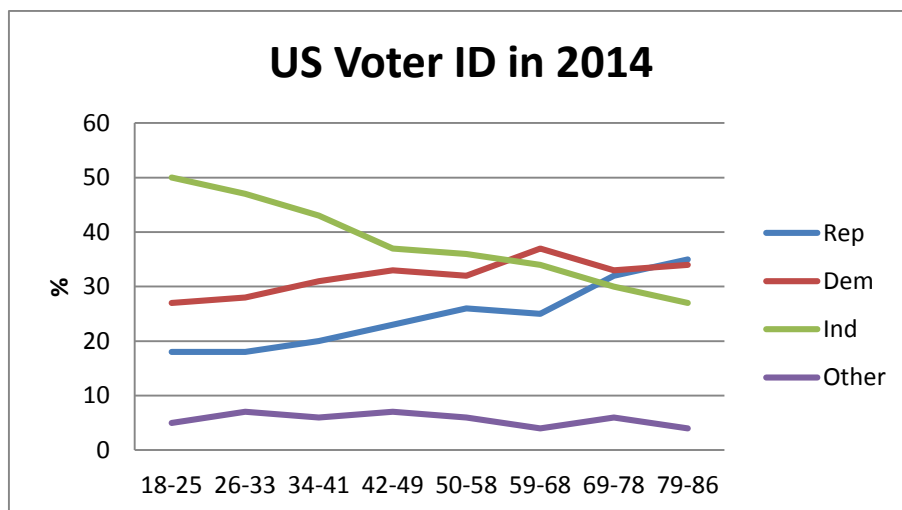
Preamble

More and more Oregonians are becoming independent and the rate at which that is occurring is growing. These voters have a distinct set of issues and concerns.

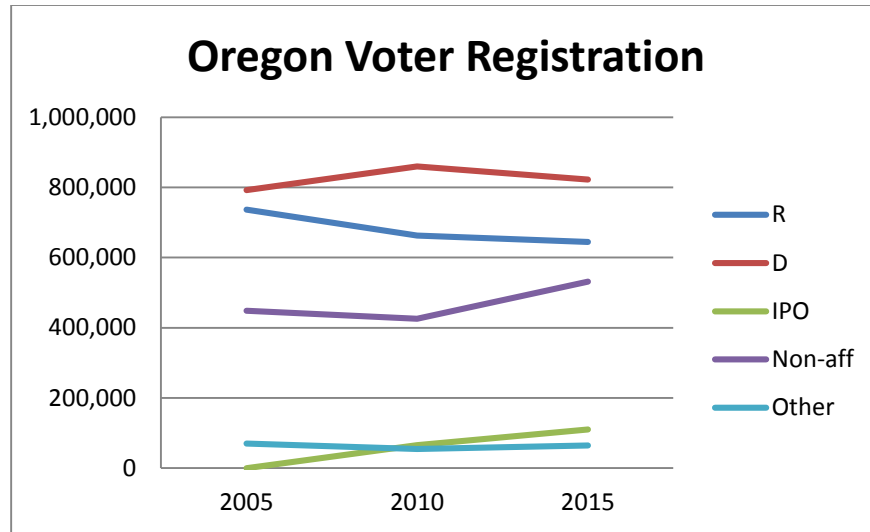
In considering public finance schemes for possible recommendation to the legislature, we articulate 3 areas below.

Imperatives for Change

The number of Oregon voters currently not registered as Democrats or Republicans has grown to about 707,000 or 32% of registered voters. The greatest growth has been in the number of non-affiliated voters and the rise of the Independent Party of Oregon, which is now officially a major party in Oregon. If this trend continues, within 10-15 years over 1,000,000 Oregonians would be independent voters and would be approaching 50% of registered voters. The rise in nonaffiliated and independent voters at the national level has been led by those in the Millennial demographic, with 50% of 18-25 year-olds identifying as politically independent in 2014.



Over the past 10 years (2005-2015), the number of Oregon voters registered as Republicans or Democrats has remained at about 1.5 million (although this number masks a loss of over 62,000 voters registered to either party). But as the total number of registered voters has grown, the percentage voters registered as Republicans or Democrats has declined from 75% to 68%, a rather significant loss in just ten years.



Reform Package

1. Many different public financing models are available for consideration. Oregon's should avoid reinforcement of advantages to major parties and their candidates. Some deficiencies and flaws in current models as they relate to independent voters and parties are listed here. Any public finance model developed in Oregon should avoid these pitfalls:
 - A. Timing of funding – Ensure that candidates who run as independents or on a minor party line, receive funding at the same time of the calendar year as major party candidates do. This prevents some candidates from receiving funds which allow promotion of themselves and their campaigns in advance of others.
 - B. Candidates who run as independents and thereby face no primary should not be forced to wait until the general election to receive public financing.
 - C. Representation on administration boards – Campaign finance boards can serve to consolidate power in the hands of the major parties if care is not given to diversify the board with representation from among independent and unaffiliated voters.
2. Reduce advantages to incumbents by applying a handicapping feature to any public financing system Oregon considers. Most public funding models allow for candidates to receive the same amount of money. But incumbents enjoy institutional advantages that allow an incumbency return rate approaching 100% in Oregon. Applying a handicap to incumbents who choose to participate in public financing – for example, providing some percentage less than 100% of financial support -- would help level the playing field.
3. Campaign finance models speak to the public nature of elections. Campaign finance models speak to the public nature of elections. Party primaries are funded by taxpayers, but closed primaries exclude unaffiliated voters—who are taxpayers—from participating in choosing those candidates who will appear on the ballot in the general election.